

Wyoming Game and Fish Department NEWSLETTER

Cody Region



WEBSITE: WGFD.WYO.GOV

JANUARY 2015

Cantankerous bison

Last month, North Cody Game Warden Travis Crane and Wildlife Biologist Doug McWhirter responded to a report of a bison on private land, off the Shoshone National Forest on the North Fork of the Shoshone River.

Management of bison in the Absaroka Mountains dictates that any bison off of the National Forest must be moved back onto USFS lands or lethally removed. When pressured, most bison go back the way they came and can be calmly escorted back to the forest.

This bull however, refused to turn around after many hazing attempts. In fact, after he left the horse pasture where he was calmly grazing, he started running down the highway toward Cody, making for some fast-paced action and concern over vehicle collisions.



Bull bison being escorted back to the Shoshone National Forest. Photos courtesy of Frank and Maureen Alvarado.

Eventually, the large bull bison decided he had enough of the constant sirens, flashing lights, honking horns, and cracker shells that were used to encourage him to turn around and go back to the forest. Crane and McWhirter escorted the big bull several miles along the North Fork Highway back to a quiet and peaceful place on the Shoshone Forest.

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G&F Calendar

2015 Season Setting meetings:

- 3/19, Thermopolis 6-8 p.m.
Historical Museum
- 3/19, Powell 6:30-8:30 p.m.
Park County Fairgrounds
- 3/19, Greybull 6-8 p.m.
Town Hall
- 3/23, Meeteetse 6-8 p.m.
Meeteetse Senior Center
- 3/24, Worland 6-8 p.m.
Washakie Co. Fairgrounds
- 3/25, Lovell 6-8 p.m.
Lovell Fire Hall
- 3/26, Cody 6-8 p.m.
Bighorn Federal Bank

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Biologists complete elk classification surveys



Elk survey conditions, South Fork Shoshone River, 1/20/2015.

Annual classification and trend surveys were conducted in Cody Region elk herd units during mid-January. When biologist count elk during classification efforts, they are reporting sample counts, not complete counts.

Cody and Clarks Fork elk herds:

A total of 5,110 elk were seen in the Cody herd unit (hunt areas 55-61, 66), while 4,058 elk were observed in the Clarks Fork herd unit (hunt areas 51-54). These figures produce a three-year running average that is 14 percent above the count objective in the Cody herd unit and 12 percent above the Clarks Fork count objective. All areas remain at or above count objectives.

Calf ratios varied between 13:100 and 28:100 in the Cody herd unit, although a small sample obtained from Hunt Area 66 produced a calf ratio of 76:100. Yearling bull ratios varied between 2:100 and 16:100, and averaged 11:100 for the herd unit. Adult bull ratios varied widely across the herd unit (0:100 to 68:100), but averaged 17 adult bulls:100 cows.

In the Clarks Fork herd unit, calf ratios varied between 14:100 for the migratory elk in Sunlight Basin and Crandall areas to 34:100 for the non-migratory elk in Hunt Area 54. Calf ratios of elk in the Trout Creek and Rattlesnake Creek drainages of Hunt Area 53 were also high at 31:100. Yearling bull ratios varied between 5:100 and 10:100, and averaged 7:100 for the herd unit. Similar to the Cody herd unit, adult bull ratios varied widely (3:100 to 30:100), but averaged 13 adult bulls:100 cows.



A group of 400 elk on Heart Mountain, 1/21/2015.



Winter conditions in Sunlight Basin, 1/21/2015.

Medicine Lodge and North Bighorns elk herds:



Elk in Hunt Area 41.

For the Medicine Lodge elk herd (hunt areas 41 and 45), a total of 2,648 elk were classified. The bull ratio was up compared to last year and steadily climbing, while the calf ratio was average.

A total of 1,675 elk were classified for part of the North Bighorns herd (hunt areas 39 and 40). The bull ratio was up, but the calf ratio was low compared to previous years. The low calf ratio could be a result of annual variation, the presence of a new observer, or higher than average calf mortality.

Gooseberry elk herd:

A total of 2481 elk were classified in the Gooseberry elk herd (hunt areas 62-64) which is nearly 250 elk less than in 2013, but about average compared to the three-year average. Based on a three-year running average trend count, the Gooseberry elk herd is nearly 39% above the winter count goal of 2000 elk. Calf ratios increased slightly compared to 2013. It appears high harvest the past few years may be driving this population down toward objective. The number of elk counted has declined by 22 percent the past three years. Calf ratios averaged 26:100 cows and total bull ratios averaged 15:100 cows.



A group of elk in Hunt Area 61.

Bighorn sheep surveys

Aerial and ground surveys to classify bighorn sheep in hunt areas 1, 2, 3, and 5 took place in mid-January.

A total of 136 sheep were classified in Hunt Area 1, and lamb:ewe and ram:ewe ratios were 22:100 and 28:100, respectively.

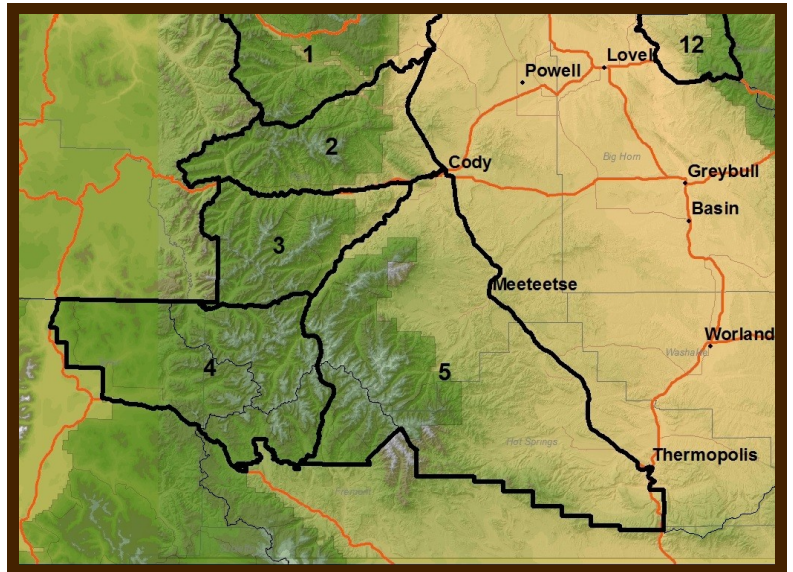
Three hundred and forty eight sheep were classified in Hunt Area 2, which yielded a lamb:ewe ratio of 31:100 and a ram:ewe ratio of 31:100.

In Hunt Area 3, 737 sheep were classified with a lamb:ewe ratio of 28:100 and a ram:ewe ratio of 24:100.

High elevation winter ranges were densely occupied, as 929 sheep were classified between 10,000 and 12,000 feet in just over four hours of survey time.

Hunt Area 4 was not flown due to poor weather conditions, but a partial sample obtained from the Lander Region showed a lamb:ewe ratio of 38:00 and a ram:ewe ratio of 42:100.

In Hunt Area 5, a total of 316 bighorn sheep were classified with a lamb:ewe ratio of 22:100 and a ram:ewe ratio of 56:100. Since the mid to late 2000's when Hunt Area 5 was at its peak, the bighorn sheep population within this hunt area has declined by 40 percent.



Bighorn sheep hunt areas within the Cody Region.



Biologists take a little break at 11,000 feet after classifying bighorn sheep in Hunt Area 5.



Bighorn sheep survey conditions at 11,000 feet on Wapiti Ridge, 1/23/2015.

Beck Lake stocked with rainbows



Last month, the Wyoming Game and Fish Department stocked 450 large Firehole rainbow trout in Beck Lake. The 16-18 inch fish came from Tillett Springs Rearing Station near Lovell where they served as broodstock (fish used for spawning).



Dean Follett, assistant supervisor at Clarks Fork Fish Hatchery stocks 16-18 inch Firehole rainbow trout in Beck Lake.

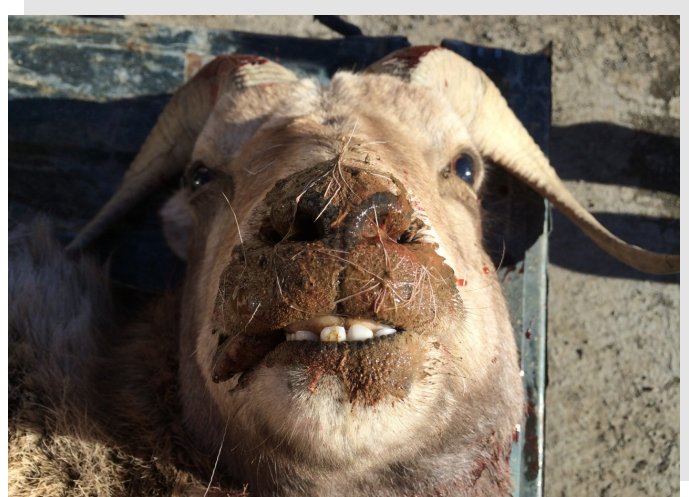
Hatcheries routinely cull broodstock fish to achieve maximum production within the facility. As fish used for spawning get older, the quality of their eggs decline so they are stocked in local waters for anglers to enjoy. These fish are usually stocked in community waters as an added bonus to the catchable-sized fish that are routinely stocked throughout the year.

The Wyoming Game and Fish Department is committed to maintaining quality family fishing opportunities in Beck Lake and surrounding community reservoirs. In 2014, a total of 4,680 rainbow trout and 1,600 channel catfish were stocked into Beck Lake. New Cody Reservoir received 3,485 rainbow and 2,400 Yellowstone cutthroat trout while Markham Reservoir had 1,220 rainbow and 1,400 Yellowstone cutthroat trout stocked. Considering the small size of these waters, that's a lot of fish and anglers can look forward to similar numbers in 2015.

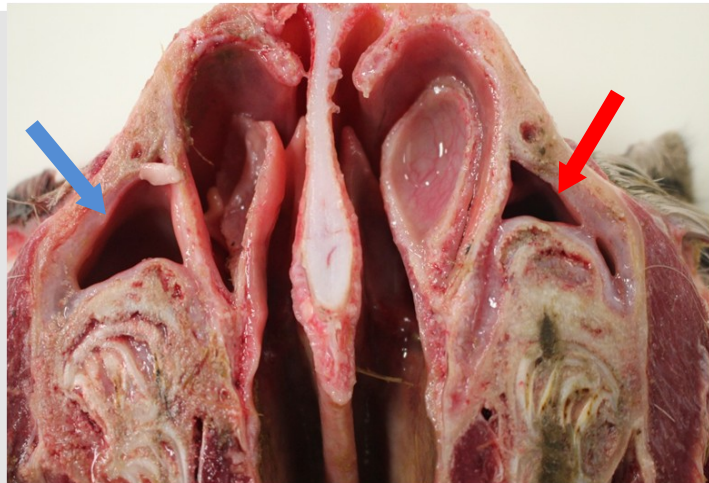
Want to visit a hatchery? There are four in the Bighorn Basin: Tillett Springs Rearing Station near Lovell; Clarks Fork Fish Hatchery near Clark; and Wigwam Rearing Station and Ten Sleep Fish Hatchery near Ten Sleep. For directions and hours of operation, visit: <https://wgfd.wyo.gov/web2011/fishing-1000429.aspx>.

Southfork ram euthanized

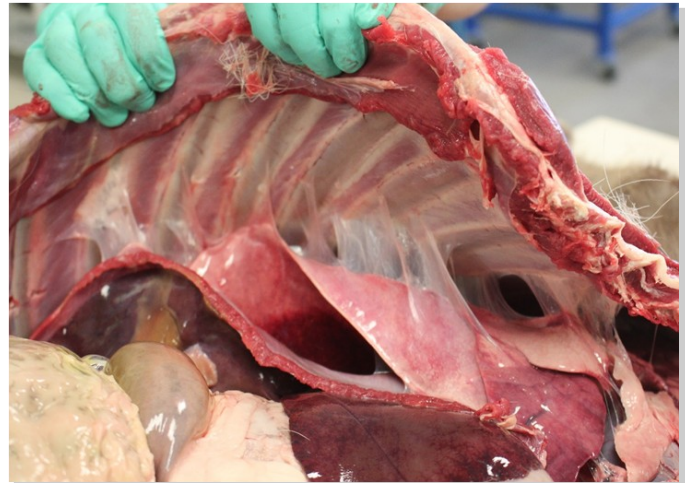
A three-year-old bighorn sheep was euthanized near the Boulder Basin trailhead in Hunt Area 5 due to persistent coughing and significant nasal discharge. The ram was submitted to the Game and Fish Vet Lab in Laramie for a diagnostic examination and was found to have a sinus tumor, which is thought to be related to the significant shedding of bacteria (often called “super-shedders”). He, like many others sampled in the Absaroka Mountains, had a variety of lethal pathogens that included the two most often implicated bacteria *Mycoplasma ovipneumoniae* and leukotoxin positive *Mannheimia haemolytica*. Other sheep in the group have been seen with slight coughs and the situation is being closely monitored.



Bighorn ram with significant nasal discharge, a consistent finding in bighorn sheep with sinus tumors.



Sinus tumor in Maxillary Sinus (red arrow). Normal Sinus (blue arrow).



Lung adhesions, evidence of past episodes of pneumonia.



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